



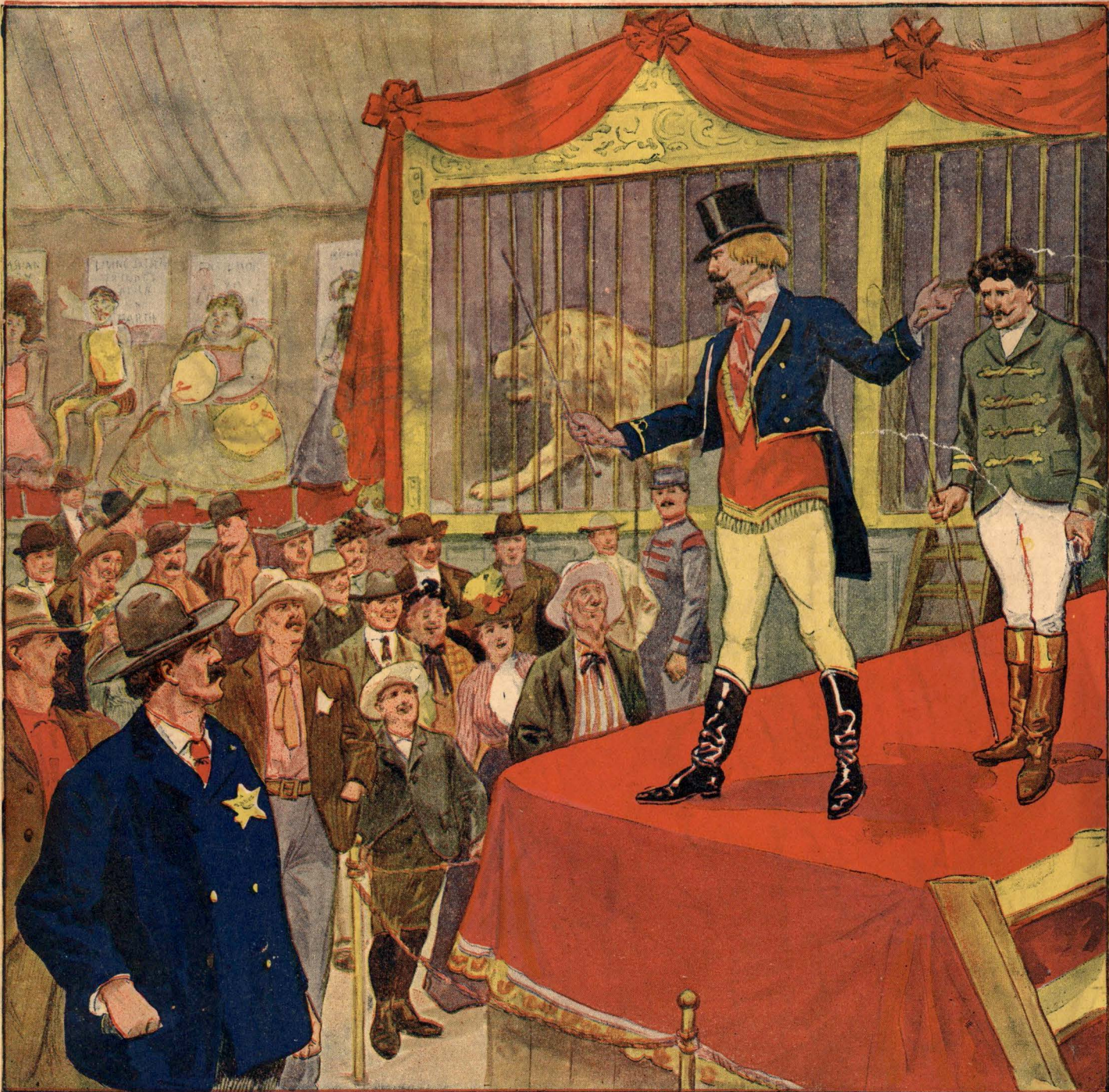
THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 20.

Price, Five Cents.



"WITH YOUR KIND PERMISSION," SAID THE DISGUISED JESSE JAMES, "SIGNOR VERDI, THE WORLD-RENOWNED LION-TAMER WILL START THE PERFORMANCE."



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No. 20.

NEW YORK, September 21, 1901.

Price Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES IN DISGUISE;

OR,

The Missouri Outlaw as a Showman.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT MORAL SHOW.

Just as night settled down over a certain city in the State of Missouri, a strange, weird music might have been heard proceeding from a spot where a couple of canvas tents announced the presence of some show.

This music was not unlike the fantastic melodies heard at a Spanish gypsy dance or the Mexican fandango.

It fell upon many ears, for quite a crowd had assembled.

Near the entrance of the larger tent stood the showman, Professor Darley, himself, he who was depicted as engaged in a series of engagements with various wild beasts in their cages.

Ever and anon a peculiar rumbling sound thrilled the people.

This was the old lion, Nero, roaring—perhaps stirred up with a sharp stick by some attendant, but of this fact the people were ignorant.

On the left of the professor was a row of large canvas paintings depicting the glories of his show, and declaring in elegant language what a great part he took in educating the minds of the people by his display of wax figures, representing many famous or notorious persons of the present and past.

Like all of his class the professor was a brazen-voiced fellow.

His remarks being witty amused the crowd, and presently people began to enter the tent.

The performance began at eight, and a full house meant much to him.

The professor counted those who entered, and was inwardly chuckling at the prospect of a good house, when his attention was arrested by a sign from a man near by.

His flushed face grew a trifle pale, and his voice faltered a little as he went on with his description of the wonderful sights to be gleaned under the canvas for the small sum of a quarter.

Under his breath he was saying:

"Heavens and earth! can it be that man, and here? I remember my oath. What can he want with me?"

The party who had caused him such uneasiness remained in the crowd.

He had a slouch hat drawn down over his eyes in such a manner that his face could not be well seen.

In figure he was rather tall and anything but stout, although his build indicated strength of the tiger species.

Darley soon brought his glowing speech to a close, and gave up his place to an assistant, who simply took in the money and invited the gentlemen to step up.

As the professor turned to enter the tent the party who had signaled him pressed after and caught his arm.

"Julius, how are you?"

"Bless my soul, can it be you, Jesse James?"

"Hush! don't breathe that name aloud."

"I forgot."

"My enemies are here by the dozen. I have been hotly chased for an hour back."

"You don't mean it."

"They know I am here."

"Jupiter! will they try to take you?"

"I reckon so," replied the other, coolly, as the in the passageway between the entrance and the tent proper.

"You won't give up tamely. It wouldn't be like you, anyhow."

The outlaw of Missouri laughed hoarsely, and laid his hand on the showman's shoulder.

"I don't intend giving up at all, Julius."

"They saw you come in?"

"Yes."

"And will watch the door?"

"No doubt of it."

"Then you have one chance. You can slip out the back way, by passing under the canvas."

The man addressed shook his head.

"It won't do, Julius."

"Why not?"

"There is a posse around your tents. They have the place surrounded. Any such attempt would meet with failure."

The showman gave an exclamation of disgust.

Whether he was more concerned over the disaster hanging above his show than the danger menacing his old friend could not be told.

"What can be done?" he asked.

"You can save me?" returned the other, in the cool assurance that distinguished him even under the hottest fire.

"Tell me how."

"That's what I'm here for. Julius, have you forgotten your oath?"

"Never."

"The time has come to redeem it. For a certain purpose I came to town. The bloodhounds of the law grow wind of it. I know the man who betrayed me, and now they think to make a sure job of it by surrounding the tents and capturing me."

"Time flies. Tell me what I can do?"

"Are you ready to take some risk?"

The showman groaned.

"I must. My oath binds me. Go on."

"You can reach your dressing-room without passing through the crowd?"

"Yes; this passage leads to it."

"Then let's go there."

"Follow me."

Loud voices at the door were heard.

"Out of the way, man, and let us in. We are officers of the law in search of Jesse James. I am the sheriff of this county."

"Begorra, it's the wax figure av Jesse James yees want to arrest. Bedad, enter an' welcome to yees all. The professor will have damages to collect if ye harrem his wax works," came the voice of the doorkeeper.

"Push on, Julius."

Although the danger was so near, the outlaw seemed to preserve his coolness.

No one had ever seen him flurried, even when bullets were flying about him like hailstones, and wounds came thick and fast.

His power of retaining his coolness in the face of danger had saved his life on more than one occasion.

They reached the professor's dressing-room.

This was a mere box of a place.

When they entered it was empty.

"Will we have a few minutes to spare?" asked the hunted man.

"The performance begins at eight; I have just time to dress."

"Then let me save you the trouble."

"Eh?"

"For one night I will be the showman."

The professor looked aghast.

"Great heavens, man! Nero would tear you in pieces if you dared enter his cage."

"Oh, perhaps so. I'm not such a fool. In fact I'd soon face the human tigers that lie in wait, and take my chances with them. You see, my talented assistant, Signor Verdi will do the lion act."

Like a flash it all passed through the brain of the showman.

He was quick to catch on.

"It can be done. I believe," he cried.

"Of course it can. Make haste and rig me out. I'll pay and do you credit for one night."

"But the risk."

Jesse James snapped his fingers.

"I don't care that for it. Hold; you are perhaps thinking of yourself, Julius; I ran a risk for you once."

His words of reproach went home.

"Say no more. See, I shall change your looks so that our mother would'n't know you."

He was as good as his words.

With deft fingers he dressed the hunted man, who helped himself as well as he was able.

The thing was done in a miraculously short space of time.

As the professor had declared, such was the change in his appearance that his nearest relative would not have known him.

"There you are. Now for yourself. All depends on you whether this is a success or failure."

"Wait and see how I manage the business. I think I am cut out for a showman. All I want is that you stand clear to give me hints, and take the reins when the team talks."

"We'll manage it, never fear."

It was something of a risky undertaking, since the officers would be present and looking everywhere for their intended quarry.

Few men would have dared to undertake it.

The hour had arrived when the performance must begin.

From the professor the new showman had gleaned some hints relative to the order of events.

Of course he meant to be on his dignity as the master of ceremonies, and let the genuine showman do most of the talking.

As they emerged from the dressing-room the larger tent was seen to be fairly well filled with people.

They gaped at the old lion in his cage and the curiosities upon the platforms.

The great aggregation of wonders was something in the order of the dime museums now seen in all the large cities.

When the showman, followed by his assistant, both dressed in their fantastic costumes, entered the main tent the attention of all present was at once directed toward them.

Jesse James played his part well.

He clapped his hands together.

All noise ceased.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to thank you for your kind attention. We will endeavor to give you your money's worth to-night. You have gazed with kindled

eyes upon the strange curiosities gathered under this canvas, the greatest aggregation of living wonders ever brought to Missouri. And now, with your kind permission, my talented assistant, the world-renowned lion tamer, Signor Verdi, will start the performance by entering yonder cage and causing the king of beasts to obey his orders—a sight that must thrill every spectator. I beg that all will keep quiet while he is caged with the beast."

Amid a breathless silence the man suddenly appeared in the cage.

The animal did not recognize him in his changed attire, and gave signs of ugliness; but a cut of the whip and a few commands in the well-known voice of his master were sufficient to bring him to his senses.

During this thrilling scene every eye must have been glued upon the cage and its inmates; at least one would think this would be the case, but a certain individual in the rear of the showman seemed to find more pleasure in staring at him than the exciting incident of the lion and his master could afford.

CHAPTER II.

DARLEY'S WAX WORKS.

The individual who appeared to be so deeply interested in the mock showman was apparently an ordinary man.

He would not attract attention anywhere.

Quietly dressed and wearing a pair of glasses, he had the appearance of a German student in search of information.

The eyes that looked through the spectacles were keen enough to pierce the disguise of the man who had assumed the position of showman.

"I've found him at last. But they don't suspect it. He mustn't fall into their hands, at least not until I have forced him to tell me that secret. I've hunted for him long, weary months, and to think I'd find him in such a place, with a sheriff and his posse around him! Will they discover the fraud? I see no evidence of it yet."

Thus muttering, the man who wore spectacles moved a little closer to the showman.

He could have put out his hand and clutched the other had he so desired; but such a move was contrary to his thoughts.

Through his mind strange thoughts were flying. He could see in imagination the sudden excitement that must ensue should he announce his discovery to the crowd.

Such a picture caused him to chuckle and then he became grave again for the showman was looking into his face.

Meanwhile the performance in the lion's cage came to a close.

Signor Verdi appeared upon the platform beside the snake charmer, and under his direction she was put through her paces.

The man with spectacles noticed that she looked in a strange way from the signor to the showman, as though puzzled.

The reptiles had been returned to their glass case, and he moved toward the girl.

It was easy to engage her in conversation, and a few compliments on her performance, skillfully worked in, made her pliable.

"What do you think of the new arrangement?" asked the stranger.

"I'm puzzled," she replied.

"In what way?"

"That man is a fraud."

"You mean the professor?"

"He calls himself so, but Signor Verdi is really the professor."

"I thought as much; that's why I asked you how you liked the new arrangement."

"Who is he, anyhow?"

"I reckon a friend of the professor he's worked in for the business. Ever seen him before?"

"Never."

Short though this conversation with the fair snake charmer was, it appeared to fully satisfy the desire of the man who wore the glasses.

He lost himself in the crowd again, assuming a position where he could watch the showman, even though in a poor place to see the performance.

Jesse James carried out his part well.

Entering into the spirit of the thing, he managed to keep the crowd interested and amused, while the signor also did his part, introducing each performer with a flourish of trumpets.

While this was going on several men might have been seen coming from different quarters, as though to consult.

It was evident that they were baffled in something they had endeavored to perform and in which they had expected an easy success.

In all there were five of them.

One was the red-faced man who had so bluntly announced himself to the keeper at the doors as the sheriff of the county.

As they consulted, their eyes were fastened upon the showman and his assistant. Jesse James saw them.

He affected not to notice their manner, although certain that they were up to some mischief or other.

The man who wore glasses also noticed their action, and kept watch upon them.

Gradually the wonders of the great aggregation were disposed of.

The show would not close for some time yet, patrons being at liberty to wander around, converse with the freaks, and buy their photos.

Earlier in the evening they had been allowed to go to the other tent and examine the wonderful wax figures, but the freaks and the lion seemed more attractive to them, so the lights had been turned low in the place where the famous people of the world could be seen in wax.

As the performance ended, the showman turned to himself faced by the five men.

The sheriff nodded familiarly, and Jesse James turned the salutation.

"Hope you were pleased with the performance, gentlemen," he said, steadily.

"Hang the performance," replied the sheriff. "I didn't come in to look at your freaks, professor, which I suppose are all very good."

"The finest aggregation of living wonders ever seen west of the Mississippi. The only performing lion in the country. All these great marvels to be seen for the small sum of twenty-five cents. Children half price."

"Look here, professor, you've got one attraction here to-night more than you bargained for."

"You don't say; step right up on the platform, what shall I announce you as? The wild man of Borneo or a reformed cannibal from the Fiji Islands?"

"Joking aside, professor, there is a man hiding under this tent who, were it known he was here, would bring five thousand people to see him."

"Great Scott! who is he? Five thousand at a time? I'll engage him; I'll pay him a thousand dollars a week for a year."

"You're too late, professor."

"How so?"

"We've got an option on him, dead or alive."

"Who are you? A rival showman?"

"Yes; I hold forth over at the penitentiary; my friends are a tough lot—murderers, train-robbers, horse-thieves and the like."

"I see; you're a——"

"Sheriff Davids."

"Glad to meet you, sheriff; shake hands."

The officer did not refuse; when later on he would learn the truth, he would want to hire some one to kill him or his assinine stupidity.

"Now, about this attraction. Who is it?"

"Jesse James."

The mock showman puckered up his lips and emitted a low whistle.

"Great Scott!" he said, "do you mean it?"

"Every word. That devil is under your canvas, and as we have the place surrounded, he is as good as a goner."

"Gentlemen, I'm with you in this business, heart and soul. Tell me what I can do, and you may depend upon it, I'll carry out your directions to the letter."

"You're no friend of Jesse James?"

"I'm the friend of law and order. You'll find me on that side always. In a show like this great aggregation of wonders, a man——"

"All right, professor, we want you to show us through your tents."

"You are at liberty——"

"We particularly desire you to lead the way. If there is any hiding-place a cunning man of his nature could discover, you will be apt to know of it. Lead on, please."

Although the words were soft and silky, there was a metallic ring in the voice of the sheriff that told plainly enough his determination to be obeyed when he spoke.

"With pleasure, gentlemen. Come with me."

They followed him as he led the way past the cage of Nero.

Darley looked after them anxiously, but did not take any step toward following.

He believed the man whom he had sworn to help, because of a debt in the past, was well able to look out for himself.

The door connecting the two tents was just beyond the lion's cage.

In the second inclosure the lights were turned down. Still, one could see around, and the many figures behind the ropes had a very weird appearance, representing, as they did, the noted persons in history.

As soon as the men passed into the tent where the wax figures were arranged, they showed their interest.

The showman proceeded to turn up the lights.

Of course the effect of this was magical.

Various exclamations attested to the manner in which the men received the shock, for it was something strange to find one's self suddenly surrounded by such fantastic creations.

One man made a bad break.

He caught the arm of the sheriff in an excited way.

"I see him! I see him! Stand still, you devil, or I'll fire; you hear me."

The latter part of this speech was not directed toward the sheriff, but thrown in the direction of a figure toward which his attention seemed to be drawn.

At the same time he leveled a revolver so as to cover the man.

The other made no move to escape.

Of course, the attention of the whole company was drawn toward the object of his solicitude, and various exclamations arose.

"It's him sure enough," said one.

"Jesse James, as I live," breathed another.

"Cover him, boys."

It was astonishing to see the readiness with which the men brought their weapons to bear upon the figure.

Still the object of their attention moved not.

"Hold!" called out the sheriff.

He was just in time to prevent them from firing upon the outlaw.

"Where are your eyes? That ain't Jesse James. Don't you see the figure is made of wax?"

The truth burst upon them.

Some were so skeptical that they would not believe it until they had gone over and felt the body.

Then they were convinced.

The showman had chuckled to see their actions all this while. He appeared to look on it as a huge joke.

"That was a compliment, gentlemen. Goes to show how true to nature my figures are. Lucky you held your fire," he said.

"Come, where do you suppose this man can be hiding?" demanded the sheriff, not a little chagrined at the mistake his men had made in the matter.

"That is a hard question to decide. We can look around and see."

The showman exhibited the greatest nonchalance with regard to the matter.

Even the sight of the various weapons in the hands of the men did not affect him. One would think he was accustomed to such scenes.

He led the men this way and that. They poked into various crevices, and were on the point several times of making great discoveries, but on each occasion it turned out to be the same old story—a fraud.

Thus time was consumed and nothing accomplished. The sheriff began to grow angry, and even glanced toward the showman as though seized with a suspicion that the other was deceiving him.

They searched until weary.

"Come, show us some other place," demanded the sheriff, gruffly.

The showman pointed out the lion's cage, but here the sheriff drew the line; he could not be induced to enter.

CHAPTER III.

THE WOODEN HORSE.

It looked as though the search must be a failure.

No Jesse James was to be found, although they looked high and low.

The mystery of the disappearance puzzled the sheriff.

His suspicions were aroused with regard to the showman himself—not that he once suspected the other's

identity, but it had entered his mind that the man was deceiving him, and had hidden away the object of their search.

If this was indeed so, how could they find out the truth?

Strategy was the only way.

"Come, we must be going. He has escaped us, and we can do no more good lingering here," he said to his men.

The sheriff was sure he could see a faint smile sweep over the face of the man whom he faced while making this remark.

Why should the showman seem pleased if he had no interest in the game?

There were still people in the outer tent, looking at the freaks.

The sheriff and his men moved to the door.

No sooner was he and his men outside than Jesse James quickly sought out Darley and clutched him by the arm.

"Lead the way to your dressing-room; quick!" whispered the outlaw.

"After me, old man."

Without the loss of a second of time, they scurried along past the wax figures.

Reaching the canvas wall, the professor crawled under it at a certain place, and, being closely followed by the hunted outlaw, the two found themselves in the small apartment where the showman had his headquarters, and which he dignified by the name of dressing-room.

Evidently Jesse James knew what he was about, for he did not waste a second, but immediately communicated his ideas to the other.

Darley pronounced them good.

He was ready to do almost anything in order to get rid of this man.

True, he owed him a debt for services rendered in the past, but the presence of the outlaw in his place threatened his show with disruption, and the sooner he could get rid of him the better he would be pleased.

Quickly he threw some fantastic garments over the form of the outlaw, and made an Arab out of the terrible train-robber.

This was all very good, but it was not enough; the sheriff and his men would be suspicious, and no matter what a man looked like, he must pass an examination before being allowed to depart.

Among his other curiosities the professor had the horse that brought about the downfall of ancient Troy.

It was a mechanical arrangement, showing on a small scale how the wooden steed was manipulated until inside the city walls, when the side opened and enough soldiers

poured out to open the gates and complete the downfall of the city.

A man could easily hide inside the hollow model, and under ordinary circumstances be free from discovery.

Could it be reached?

"Step here," said the professor.

He raised a flap of the canvas.

There stood the wooden horse, and at a touch from the professor's hand, the false side dropped, showing the cavity.

"In with you."

It was probably the greatest experience in all the strange life of the train-robber.

Without hesitation he scrambled inside.

The door snapped shut.

He was left in darkness.

Groping around him, his hands came in contact with the mechanism by means of which the automatic horse was impelled.

He listened.

Sounds came to him from without.

He could catch the murmur of voices, growing more distinct as the persons advanced.

The man inside the wooden horse awaited the coming of events calmly.

He kept his presence of mind, and was ready to take advantage of any event that turned up.

At the same time he could picture the amazement and fury that must come upon the sheriff when he discovered that he had been defeated and his intended prey was gone.

It afforded him some amusement.

Such games of course brought their share of peril with them, but he was used to that.

The searchers were still threshing about in every corner, hoping to find the man who seemed to have a peculiar faculty for slipping through their fingers in an unaccountable manner.

If any of them chanced to know about the secret of the wooden horse it was just as likely that they would take a look inside to satisfy their curiosity.

The man who crouched there found his position getting cramped.

Thinking to better it, he moved.

In doing so his hand came in contact with some sort of lever, and he pressed upon it.

To his surprise and consternation he felt the wooden horse begin to move.

He had started the wheels into action, and the great spring that caused the automatic movement of the legs began to get its work in.

Of course, Jesse James was annoyed.

His first thought was that it would give his hiding-place away.

He knew enough about the working of the wooden horse to understand that its movement could be controlled from within.

There were peepholes just beyond him, in the breast of the stallion, and through these the person in hiding could see.

One difficulty bothered him. How was the wooden horse controlled? What was he to do as a pilot or driver, in order to direct his steed?

He crawled forward to the opening.

Looking through this he found that the automaton was making a circular course around the tent, the guiding levers having evidently been set for this purpose.

People were getting out of the way.

It was the most singular ride Jesse James ever experienced.

What would it end in?

When the sheriff and his posse came upon the wooden horse, perhaps their suspicions would be aroused, and they would want to investigate its interior.

Such a course would be fatal to his safety.

He would resist to the death.

A thought.

Why could he not manage to manipulate his wooden Pegasus? There must be a means of turning the automatic horse to the right or left, and of increasing his speed.

Who could tell but what the strange invention might not equal a Dexter in speed?

He set about investigating.

It seemed very probable that the steering apparatus must be situated near by, for the man at the lookout would be the party to make use of it.

Out went his hands.

Luck was with him, for he immediately discovered the appliance he sought.

He at once began to experiment with it, and found that it worked to a charm.

By a delicate pressure he could alter the course of the wooden horse.

When the animal began to leave its settled track and begin a zigzag movement, shouts of alarm arose.

The spectators fled for their lives.

Suddenly just ahead of him the pilot saw the form of the sheriff, who had just come from the adjoining tent and was surveying the scene in wonder.

CHAPTER IV.

WRECKED IN THE STREET.

With a spirit of devilry controlling him, Jesse James manipulated the steering apparatus so that the wooden horse made a beeline for the sheriff.

That worthy, seeing the automatic beast advancing upon him, threw up his revolver and fired at the wooden head.

Of course, this had no effect, since the wood was not sensitive to leaden missiles.

Had he thought to aim lower down he might have done deadly execution.

On went the horse.

The sheriff seemed dazed.

He would undoubtedly have been knocked down and trampled on, had not one of his men caught hold of his arm and drawn him aside.

The horse immediately turned and seemed to be looking for the sheriff. At least it appeared that way to him.

He had just time to jump aside again when the strange automatic steed went past.

"Stop the horse! I believe he holds our man," yelled the suspicious sheriff.

He knew full well there must be some controlling spirit inside the animal in order to guide him.

As though the wooden horse must have heard his words, the animal now made a beeline for the opening of the tent.

Those who were in the way cleared out in a hurry.

Pressing the guide levers, the hidden man sent his strange steed through the opening.

The ticket seller stood upon his soap box to see that order was maintained, and impress upon the minds of the retiring audience the fact that the show would hold forth with a new programme for a week.

The wooden horse came upon him totally unawares, and, as a consequence, box and man went rolling in the dust.

Out went the horse.

Shouts in the rear warned the hunted man that he was being followed.

This would not do.

He must either increase the speed of the animal or else desert his hiding-place.

Seeking the other lever he pressed upon it with all his might.

The result was satisfactory.

With great leaps the wooden horse swept onward. The man inside almost had his neck dislocated by the rough passage.

He hung on like grim death.

Meanwhile his enemies had been distanced.

He could not hear anything of them. But this was not at all singular, for the clatter made by the machinery inside the wooden horse was something astonishing.

Keeping a good lookout ahead, he managed to avoid running over any one.

Wild excitement followed his course.

People thought the wooden horse was some species of elephant escaped from the show.

It was the intention of the outlaw to guide his strange steed to a certain point and there desert him, for he had friends in town who would look after him.

He was balked in this design.

Some ambitious chap, armed with a gun undertook to shoot the strange beast that was terrorizing the neighborhood.

His aim was poor, but it proved effective.

The bullet struck one of the legs of the wooden horse, and utterly demolished the spring that controlled its movements.

Down it went in a heap.

Some men would have met their death in the wreck, for the automaton was going at a rapid pace when the catastrophe occurred.

Not so Jesse James.

He escaped with hardly a scratch, and managed to crawl out from under the wreck of the professor's horse.

A squad of panting men came racing up the street.

"Hold that man!" some one shouted.

The same ambitious fellow whose gun had brought about this catastrophe made a rush forward to throw himself upon the man who was rising from the ruins.

He was met by a tremendous blow in the face that staggered him.

Others had by this time recovered from their amazement at seeing the colossal horse fall in ruins in the roadway.

When they had a man to face they could act without hesitation.

A rush forward was made.

By a quick action the outlaw drew his revolvers and leveled them.

"Keep back, or you're dead men. I'm Jesse James, and I shoot to kill!"

The situation made a strange tableau for a dozen seconds or so.

There stood the man-tiger in the midst of the wreck of the wooden horse, resembling an Arab in many particulars, and holding at bay those who would have rushed upon him but for their fear of the result.

He waited, but the attack did not come.

The sheriff and his posse advanced closer.

"Bah! you are coyotes," exclaimed the outlaw.

Turning he sprang away.

They did not follow him, but the man who had been knocked down, gaining his feet, again began emptying his revolver in the quarter whence the fugitive had vanished.

He only ceased firing when his weapon was empty, and then there arose a racket. A voice, unmistakably Hibernian in its accent began calling down the fury of all the saints upon the man who had put a bullet through the leg of the owner.

What with the confusion that followed the arrival of the wounded man on the scene, and his hot demands to be shown the spalpeen who had disabled him, together with the coming of the sheriff and his posse, Babel reigned.

This was of great advantage to the outlaw.

He undoubtedly had been befriended by fate, and this breathing time enabled him to make good his escape.

Turning a corner he walked rapidly down a street with which he was acquainted.

When he heard the roar of voices approaching he stepped into a niche in a wall and waited.

The crowd of men rushed by.

Their shouts sounded loud on the night air.

As the hunted man heard them he shivered a little and then laughed in the manner of one who had grown callous to danger.

The crowd rushed past the head of the street where he crouched.

When they had all gone he slipped out from his place of concealment and continued down the street.

A few minutes later he paused and looked up at a house.

"This must be the place," he said, slowly. "Yes, I'm dead sure of it."

He stepped up to the door and rapped.

No answer came, and a second signal was necessary before he could make any one hear.

Then a window was thrown open above, and a head adorned with a singular nightcap made its appearance.

The mob, swollen in numbers, seemed to have retraced its steps and was now turning down the narrow street into which he had escaped.

Perhaps some one had put them on the right trail.

At any rate, his situation must soon be growing desperate again, unless he found a way of entering.

As soon as the head appeared he called softly:

"Barton!"

"Who is that?" asked the man above, unable to make out the figure below.

"Bend your head; it's Jesse James."

"Jupiter!"

"I've come to keep our compact, but the devils are after me hot."

"Is that them turning in above?"

"Yes."

"You want to come in?"

"Well, I reckon I do, or there'll be blood on your doorstep before morning."

"Wait till I throw on some clothes, and I'll come down to open the door."

"Never mind; I'll come up to you, Barton."

With that the outlaw seized hold of the vines growing around the house under the little balcony that shaded the door.

He went up with the agility of a monkey.

In a minute he had reached the balcony.

He crouched to see the crowd sweep by.

They presented a strange appearance, being made up of a variety of elements.

The sheriff and his men were leaders, then came a police officer or two, and a number of men who had been in the audience of the show.

Shouting and waving lanterns, the men rushed down the street, nor did one of them seem to pay the slightest attention to the house where the vines clustered around the balcony.

When the rag-tag and bob-tail crowd had gone, Jesse James once more entered into the consideration of his future course.

The man he called Barton was at a window near the balcony.

He saw that the venturesome outlaw was about to cross over to him.

"Wait; I'll open that window."

"Correct!" replied the other.

When he found the way clear, he crawled through the opening and entered a room.

All was darkness.

Carefully the man closed the window, drawing down a shade, and even dropping heavy curtains on either side.

"It's safe to strike a match," he announced.

"Here goes, then."

As Jesse drew a match across the carpet, the flame burst out.

Having lighted a lamp, he turned to survey his companion, and laughed at the figure he presented, adorned as he was with dressing-gown and a tasseled nightcap.

"Well, who's here, Barton?"

"Frank."

"Good."

"And two others, Liddel and Mason."

"All but one on hand, then."

"You mean the doctor?"

"Yes."

"He'll be here before long, I'm sure, providing he's in the land of the living."

"Well, I've had my share of adventure for one night. I reckon I'll get some rest."

"They're not apt to get on your track again?"

"I don't see how they can. You, yourself, saw them rush by. I heard shots down the street later, and I reckon they're chasing some poor, frightened devil who imagines they intend cleaning out his pockets."

"Come, I'll show you a bed."

"Thanks."

The weary train-robber followed Barton into a small room where stood a cot.

"There you are, Jesse."

Throwing himself upon it, the other yawned.

"This just suits me. Good-night, Barton. If the doctor comes, wake me up."

"All right."

They were men of few words.

Barton withdrew, and the other composed himself to sleep with as much composure as though no such thing as danger existed, his control over his nerves being astonishing.

CHAPTER V.

DARING PLANS.

Time passed.

Jesse James was a light sleeper, and when a hand touched his arm, he seemed to be wide awake in a moment.

"What is it?" he asked.

The room was wrapped in darkness, and he could see no one, but the idea was forced upon him that a figure bent over him.

"Are you fully awake?" asked a low voice.

"Of course I am," testily; "is it you, Barton?"

A whisper in the affirmative answered him.

"What's up?" he continued.

"Come and see."

He followed his guide without hesitation, and soon entered a room where there was a light.

Seated upon a chair was a dust-covered man. At his feet lay a pack.

He was a peddler.

Jesse James looked at him attentively as he slowly advanced.

Then he held out his hand.

The peddler grasped it.

When the train-robber felt his peculiar clutch his last doubt vanished.

"It's the doctor, come at last," he said.

"Correct, and a hard time I had getting here," declared the seeming peddler, as he stretched himself out in his chair.

"How so?"

"The detectives are as thick as flies in summer, and I reckon I ran across a dozen, more or less, on the way from Independence here."

At this the other chuckled.

"That's nothing."

"It isn't, eh? Well, if you'd gone through my experience you would have something to talk about, Jesse James."

"Bah! I had forty men at my heels when I came into this house!"

"What! was it you they chased?"

"Yes, how did you know anything about it?"

"Well, they got after me, too."

"The deuce you say."

"I was coming up the street when I heard the racket, and conceiving the notion that they were after me, turned and ran."

"How did you get away?"

"You know I'm something of a fox in my way, and managed to double on my trail. At any rate I gave them the slip, and assuming another disguise, came here."

"And right glad I am to see you."

"Barton says all are here."

"You were the only one missing."

"Shall I call the others?" asked the man of the house, still wearing his wonderful dressing-gown and tasseled nightcap.

"Yes, call them in, Barton. The sooner we're on to this game the better it'll please me. Call Frank and the boys."

The man of the house left them.

In five minutes he returned, but not alone, three others accompanying him.

One of these was Frank James, the others men who worked under his lead, just as desperate in their way as he was, and yet lacking a number of his traits.

Six men were now in the room.

After familiar greetings, Jesse James seemed to call the convention to order.

It was really a league of crime.

They were here to plan their daring raids upon the railroad and express companies doing business in that section of the country.

The present raid was one that promised them great booty; but the manner of undertaking it did not differ in any degree from those which had served as predecessors.

A train was to be stopped.

The express car contained a large sum of money which they coveted.

At a certain station all of them were to get on the train as strangers to each other.

When the express slowed up crossing a bridge, they were to begin work.

Two of them would crawl over the express and baggage car, reach the tender, and, suddenly appearing before the astonished fireman and engineer, control matters as they pleased.

Meanwhile the others would move forward to the car which held the booty they coveted.

At a signal whistle the engineer would be forced to make, the coupling-pin would be pulled out, and the train left behind, only the one car shooting ahead with the engine.

Some miles away, in a lonely spot, they would come to a stand.

No matter how brave the messenger inside the car might be, he could not hope to resist these six men unaided.

They would burn the car or blow one end of it off before they let him defy them.

This was the plan Jesse James spread before the members of his gang.

They eagerly agreed to be with him, knowing that his presence usually insured success.

In the excitement of talking over what they would accomplish, Jesse threw off the incubus that had been pressing so heavily upon him.

Work always brightened his spirits.

The council was dissolved.

There was still time to get a good sleep, and when Barton had shown them a lounge, the leader of the train-robbers cast himself upon it.

He was soon asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

A RUNAWAY LOCOMOTIVE.

Jesse James slept until the morning was well advanced, and then awoke just as the clock was beating the hour of nine.

The gang passed the day in Barton's house.

As night was falling two of them went away.

Ten minutes later another couple took their departure from the place.

Barton himself and Jesse James brought up the rear.

They arrived at the station some time before the arrival of the southbound express.

The rest of them were there, but none of them pretended to know each other; they passed as strangers, and aroused no suspicions.

Minutes glided by.

The clock marked the time when the train was due, and anxious eyes looked up the track.

Evidently the express was late.

A whistle sounded in the distance.

"There she comes!" some one called out, and a light appeared around a curve.

It was the express.

Jesse James glanced at the clock as the massive engine went past, slowing up.

Seven minutes late.

They would make up this time before going twenty miles, unless something happened to delay them still more.

If the plans of the James gang were carried out, such a thing was sure to occur.

"All aboard!"

The outlaw leader took a last look to assure himself that his men had gotten aboard.

He received a signal wave of the hand that told him all was well.

The train began to move.

He sprang aboard.

Away they went, gaining more speed as the engine wheels gripped the rails more firmly.

Jesse James entered the smoker.

Here his men had seated themselves, each apparently engaged in a quiet smoke.

The conductor came around and took up their tickets one by one.

When he reached the leader he glanced at him and gave a visible start.

Jesse James knew he had been recognized, and he was angry to think he had not disguised himself when he had the chance.

It was too late now.

He assumed an air of *sang froid*.

"How are you, Nathan?"

"Pretty well, I reckon. How is it with yourself?" responded the conductor, uneasily.

The presence of this man on his train made him feel that something was on the tapis.

"Never was better able to jerk lead. I reckon I could knock a button off your coat, Nathan, if you tried to get out of that door in a hurry."

"Then I won't try."

"That's sensible. Sit down and talk."

The official looked as though he would much rather leave the car. Perhaps he could warn the express messenger and at least put him on his guard, even though it would be impossible to effect the capture of the outlaw.

He read a threat under the polite invitation to be seated, and, unable to refuse, dropped down beside his passenger.

They chatted sociably for a short time.

Jesse James could be as agreeable as any man when he chose.

All the while he was listening.

The conductor saw it.

This made him more uneasy than before, as he rightly guessed what was impending.

Several times he would have left the other, but Jesse James touched his hand on his shoulder and begged him to remain seated.

He obeyed.

Nearly half an hour had thus passed when from the locomotive came a long whistle.

"What is that for, Nathan?"

"The big trestle. It is necessary to blow before entering upon it."

"Ah, yes; I supposed so."

Two men went out of the car. The conductor was about to spring after them in order to warn them that they could not be allowed upon the front platform, when he felt a nudge at his side.

"Sit still. Those are friends of mine, Nathan."

Looking down the conductor discovered with a cold chill that it was a revolver he felt poking him in the ribs.

He changed his mind and sat still.

Pretty soon two more men left the car.

Things began to look serious.

Conductor Nathan would have given a year's salary to have been at liberty to do as he pleased.

He knew it would cost him his life, however, to attempt any move, and that was worth more to him than all else.

At last a man in front stood up.

He made a quick motion with his hand.

At the same moment from the engine came a series of sharp whistles which are generally sounded to frighten cattle from the track.

This was a signal meant for the ears of the notorious train-robber.

It told him his men had captured the locomotive, and that the time had come to separate the express car from the rest of the train.

They were over the long trestle now, and entering a cut beyond.

Jesse James bade the conductor good-night.

"We've got a little game on hand, Nathan, and the boys want my assistance. No need of your worrying, it can't do any good now. Sit where you are, and if we leave you behind make sure another train doesn't run you down in the cut."

With these comforting words, the outlaw left the smoker.

As he passed out upon the platform of the baggage car, the rattle of the train in the narrow confines of the cut became fearful.

It was evident, however, that they were slackening speed.

A man stood there.

"Come," he said, "the others have gone through the baggage-car."

"Then we'll follow suit."

When they entered the baggage-car the baggage smasher looked at them in dismay.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated, "two more!"

"Yes, and others to follow. Don't you forget it, old man, the train is in our hands, and any attempt at treachery will meet with death. Move on, Dick."

They passed through the car and out at the forward end.

Now only the express-car remained between themselves and the engine, and it had no platform to hold them.

The others had mounted to the roof and thus reached the engine.

Jesse James ordered his three men to also clamber aloft, which they did, lying down on the roof of the express-car.

One thing now remained to be done.

After mounting himself the chief of the train robbers leaned over and took hold of the bellcord.

He held a knife in his other hand, and a piece of rope which he had fastened to the coupling-pin below.

Giving the bell cord a jerk he signaled for the engineer to slow up, in order that he might pull out the pin.

This was done.

Then a slash of the knife severed the bell cord; another jerk and the engine increased speed; the express-car opened a chasm between itself and the baggage which was quickly widened.

Thus far success had come to them.

The main part of the train was left behind in the cut; with the engine and express-car they put space between. Suddenly with a jerk they leaped forward.

Faster and faster their speed increased.

Even Jesse James began to grow alarmed.

What could it mean?

They were making tremendous time, and it was with difficulty that the men on the roof of the express-car could hold on.

Instead of diminishing, their pace grew even more furious. It seemed as though the locomotive must have run away.

CHAPTER VII.

A DOOMED EXPRESS-CAR.

Jesse James could stand it no longer.

He must see what it all meant.

Laboriously he crawled along the flat top of the car, and at length reached the end nearest the locomotive.

The extreme darkness made his position seem all the more dangerous.

A light now came from the engine, however, and he could see that some one had opened the door of the fire-box.

Two figures were thrown into relief upon the rocking, plunging engine.

One of these made frantic signs to him. But if he shouted, his voice was deafened by the rattle and roar of the iron horse.

Still the outlaw had sense enough to comprehend what was wanted.

His men needed help.

Something not down on the programme had occurred, and his presence was needed to assist them.

Without a moment's delay he scanned the situation, and decided on his plan of action.

A jump was necessary.

There was no other means of reaching the tender of the locomotive.

Gritting his teeth, he bent down, and then sprang into space.

While going at this tremendous pace, it seemed a dangerous move to make, but he knew what his chances were.

Landing upon the coal, he rolled over.

Beyond a few bruises, he sustained no injury, and quickly picked himself up.

The engine swayed to and fro in a fearful manner, and seemed on the point of toppling over when they turned a curve.

Jesse James clutched one of the men by the arm.

"What's wrong?"

"The old thing's run away, and we don't know how to stop it," shouted the other.

"Where's the driver?"

"Jumped overboard just after throwing the throttle open."

"And the stoker?"

The man pointed among the coal piles.

"We had to knock him out; he showed fight."

"Why don't you shut off the throttle?"

"We have, but it won't work."

"Great guns! we'll run on until we run into the north-bound express at this rate."

"You try it."

"I will."

He grasped the lever and threw it into place, then gradually began to close the throttle.

Their mad speed lessened.

"Hurrah! you've done it, Jesse."

"You forgot the lever, that's all; but it might have cost us dear."

The engine slowed up, but continued running until they had reached a lonely-looking spot, where their evil work could be done without any chance of molestation. "Here we are."

With the dexterity of an engineer, Jesse James ought engine and express-car to a stand.

Then, with his companions, he sprang to the ground and joined the others who had hastened to descend from the roof.

The six men stood before the car.

Jesse James knocked on the door.

"Hello! there inside!"

"What's wanted?" called out a voice, but the messenger made no move to open.

"We've had a wreck on the road."

"That's bad."

"We need help to get the engine on the track."

"Sorry, but I can't help you, gents."

"Open the door, then. You've got some tools in there we want. I'm the conductor."

"Not much. The only tools in here are a couple of six-shooters, which I am ready to handle with pleasure."

The outlaws were growing furious.

Still they believed they had the game in their hands, and that it was only a matter of time when they must accomplish the end they were striving for.

"Come, have done with this nonsense, man. I am the conductor of this train, and I order you to open the door."

"Were you a dozen times the conductor, it would make no difference. No one has any authority over this car but myself. I know what you say is a lie. The rest of the train has been left behind. I reckon I'm talking with Jesse James."

"That's just what you're doing. Now, I admire a brave man, but it won't do to carry this too far. You'll get hurt."

"So will some of your fellows," answered the undaunted messenger.

Jesse James swore like a trooper.

Then he opened fire upon the car.

His companions followed suit.

Their bullets riddled the door of the car pretty well, and it really looked as though there was a chance of the messenger being hit.

When they ceased firing a shot came from inside the car, and a bullet scraped the shoulder of the outlaw leader.

The messenger was undaunted.

He could not be conquered in this way.

Some other means must be employed to bring him to terms.

Jesse James cudged his brains.

Various expedients flashed before him.

They might make a fire under the car and consume it, but in so doing would also burn up that which they coveted.

Could they secure a proper boom, by using it as a battering ram, the door of the car could be broken open, but no such handy tree trunk was lying around.

What then?

An ax would demolish the door, and yet such a weapon could not be found.

True, they might make use of the hammer used by the fireman to break his coal, but at the best this was a poor affair.

Something else must be done.

The train-robber was fertile in resources, and it mattered little to him who got hurt so long as his affairs were carried out.

A thought occurred to him.

It was a brilliant, but cruel idea, and one that well became such a man of blood.

He stepped near the car.

"Hello, messenger," tapping with his revolver on the wooden siding.

"Hello, Jesse James!" came the answer.

"I'm going to give you one chance for your life; if you refuse to take it, you're as good as a dead man."

"Thanks, awfully," came the sarcastic reply.

"We are bound to get at the contents of your car, even if we have to smash you up."

"Well?"

"I'm going to run the engine a quarter of a mile up the road and then let her rush down on you at full speed."

"The deuce you say."

"As a result, your car will be wrecked and no doubt death will come to you in the racket."

"Very likely."

"You can save yourself."

"You mean I could."

"If you are a fool you'll refuse."

"Well, I'm a fool then."

"Then your death be on your own head, curse you for an idiot."

"Go to thunder, Jesse James. I rode with you years ago, but I've been ashamed to ever tell it. Do your worst. I can only die at my post."

The train-robber was sullen with rage.

He no longer had any consideration for the man's life, but was only anxious to dispose of him in the quickest way possible.

Stepping back, he drew his men around him for consultation.

"Do you mean to carry out your idea?" asked Frank James.

"To the letter."

"I have a better one to propose."

"Then out with it."

"There's a switch a little way back."

"I know it."

"Running into a quarry."

"Well?"

"We could turn it, and send the car in there like a thunderbolt. The result would be a smash-up, and after that the boodle must fall into our hands easily."

"Frank, you're a dandy!"

"You like the plan?"

"Yes."

"It saves the engine."

"In case we want to get away in a hurry that would be no small point in our favor."

"It shall be done. Here, Dick!"

"On deck, Jesse."

"Take this lantern from the engine. Hurry down the track carrying this hammer. When you come to the switch break the lock, open the switch, and then signal me."

"Good."

Liddell took the lantern and hurried away.

They could see the light scurrying along as the train wrecker jumped from tie to tie.

The switch was about an eighth of a mile away, but he soon reached it.

Meanwhile Jesse James saw that the coupling-pin was removed so that the engine and car would be separated when he reversed his lever.

All that had passed between them had been spoken in a loud voice, as though it was their intention to make the express messenger learn what fate had in store for him.

He could not have missed it.

Still he made no sign.

If ever a brave man lived, the fellow who held that car was of that caliber.

Even certain death did not daunt him.

The train wreckers could not but admire his devotion to duty, even while furious at the extra work it entailed upon them.

Mounting the engine, Jesse James bade his men secure seats somewhere about it. Two of them rode upon the cowcatcher.

Then leaning out he looked backward.

Minutes passed.

The lantern no longer jogged up and down, but remained stationary.

Evidently Dick had placed it on the ground while he worked at the switch.

Listening attentively, the outlaw could hear the cle strokes of the hammer smiting the steel, and he knew his orders were being obeyed.

At the same time he heard a distant faint whistle. gave him some uneasiness for he feared it meant evil for them.

Perhaps the news had in some way been flashed down the road, and this engine might be bringing officers to the scene.

Then it occurred to him that it came from up the road in the direction of the stalled train.

Before he had time to puzzle over this thing, he saw the lantern waving.

It described several distinct circles.

This meant come ahead.

All was ready.

He blew a series of sharp whistles.

There came no sign from the messenger within the doomed car.

He must have resigned himself to his fate.

"Here we go, boys," called the leader.

There was a hiss of steam.

The engine started backward with a sudden force, and began to speed over the rails.

Faster and faster went the motor and the doomed express-car.

The men on board fairly held their breath.

Frank James had his head out of the cab window on the fireman's side, and he caught the sudden swing of the amateur switchman's lantern, signifying that it was time they started off steam and let the car rush on.

"Stop her, Jesse!" he bawled.

The other instantly obeyed.

A gulf appeared between the express-car and the engine, which rapidly widened as the motor slowed down while the fated car rolled on to the quarry switch at a fearful pace.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE STRONG-BOX.

A smash-up was now inevitable.

The car must be reduced to kindling wood, and the chances were fifty to one that the rash messenger would meet his death in the wreck—indeed he had no show.

The man at the switch stepped well aside as the car swept by.

Then he swung his lantern vigorously to signify that all was working well.

Every ear was strained to catch the crash that must announce the arrival of the car at the terminus of the switch.

As they expected, the crash came.

It sounded as though a small earthquake had broken loose.

Then all was still.

Not a cry came from the wreck.

Hurrying along the men overtook their comrade who carried the lantern.

Then all advanced in a body.

Presently they sighted the wreck of the express car.

It had come against the rocks with tremendous force, and was shattered to pieces.

At once they began to search.

Two things they sought—the body of the faithful messenger and his little iron safe.

It may be surmised, however, that they were more deeply interested in the latter—indeed they cared very little about the other so long as the money box came into their hands.

Somehow or other they did not seem to find either. They went over the wreck, even climbing across the side of the car that remained partially uninjured, in the endeavor to discover that which so engaged their minds.

Still no trace of it.

The men were puzzled.

Could it be possible that the messenger and his safe were thrown ahead?

Some of them, possessed with this idea, clambered upon the rocks.

The result was just the same.

Another shrewd fellow, taking the lantern, made his way under the side of the car.

Although he expected to make great discoveries there, the result failed to justify his hopes.

One thing strange had struck Jesse James—they had not discovered the least sign of blood upon any fragment of the car.

This opened his eyes.

He began to suspect that perhaps the messenger might not have been killed.

When he mentioned this fact to his companions they shook their heads.

Not being as long sighted as their leader, they could not for the life of them comprehend how such a thing could be.

"No man could live through such a smash-up; it's out of the question," declared Frank.

"Very true, but I don't say he lived through it. What I claim is that possibly the fellow was never in it."

This strange assertion caused his comrades to open their eyes.

It mystified them still more.

"How could that be?"

"See here. This is the side of the car that had the door in it."

"Both had."

"Never mind. I want you to notice the fact that the sliding door is wide open."

"Yes."

"That never occurred in the collision, for a door could not be thrown backward."

"I see your point," said Liddle.

"I believe that fellow threw open the side door just about the time we started the car on its trip, tossed out his little chest, and followed it himself."

His companions saw the logic of his words.

Really, the case seemed plausible.

"Let us go back and look."

"Agreed."

They abandoned the wreck of the car, since nothing of value could be found there.

Hastening along the switch, they soon came to the main line.

Here the search began.

Some of them went along either side, but Jesse James with the lantern in his hand took the bank, which, in his mind, corresponded with the position of the side of the car.

He was looking for certain signs.

When he had passed the engine and almost reached the spot where their work had begun, Jesse James came to a sudden stand.

"Here it is."

His words announced a discovery.

The others came crowding around.

Jesse James kept them back and pointed to the ground. Marks were plainly seen.

It was easy to see where a man's heels had struck the ground, and back a dozen feet was a sharp-pointed indentation.

Here was where the small iron chest had come in contact with the earth, rolling down the bank.

It really looked as though Jesse James' theory might be the correct one.

The others may not have believed in it before, but now they were convinced.

It was evident that the messenger had been a shrewd man as well as a brave one.

He understood what they were about to do, and had forestalled them.

What had become of him?

This was the point most interesting to the outlaw just at present.

He believed the messenger would have to come to the strong box.

Hence he looked for a trail, and found it.

The iron chest had rolled out of the car and down the little embankment.

Here where it had lain.

It could not be found now.

Footprints were plainly seen, and the marks that indicated the manner in which the little chest was carried away.

It began to look like victory again.

"We'll follow the fellow," exclaimed Jesse James, as he turned to pursue the tracks.

His men were just as eager.

They seemed to scent their prey, just as a wolf might the presence of a wounded deer.

A rush was made.

The trail was plain, and they could have no difficulty about following it.

Before they had gone forty feet they were made aware of the fact that trouble was in the air.

A pistol shot rang out.

The flash came from in front.

With the report came a jingling of broken glass, and then sudden darkness.

Either by accident or design the messenger's bullet had smashed the lantern.

The accident rather staggered the assaulting party for a brief space of time.

Then Jesse James recovered his breath.

With an oath he sprang forward, dropping the now useless part of the lantern.

He held a revolver in his hand, and as he thus advanced he opened fire.

If anything human was in front of him it would be apt to suffer.

The others dared not shoot for fear lest they should strike their leader; but he kept up a fusilade that was enough to down a small army.

Thus advancing and banging away, Jesse James emptied his revolver.

By this time he had reached the spot from whence the single shot had come.

Something lay in his way.

He tripped over it, and fell full length upon the ground.

As he tried to gain his footing again he discovered what it was that had been the cause of his downfall.

The iron chest.

"Here it is, boys!" he called out, gleefully. "Take hold, Barton; we'll carry it back to the engine, where we can break it open."

Willingly Barton complied.

Between them they had no trouble in carrying the chest. Its weight was not enough to cause them any inconvenience, and the prospect of dividing its contents was enough to make them feel the burden still less.

Thus the messenger's strong-box, which he had de-

fended so valiantly, and only given up when he could no help himself, was carried back to where the captured locomotive stood not far from the switch.

In the darkness beyond lay the shattered car, with its express packages smashed.

One of the men sprang upon the engine and held out a sledge hammer, used, perhaps, for breaking large and obstinate lumps of coal, or for some other purpose about the engine.

"Hark!"

All listened.

It was easy to hear the distant, but distinct sound of swift revolving wheels on the rails.

Evidently something was coming, though miles away. It might be a train, or an engine; but no matter, it's coming meant trouble for them.

"Quick! we must get out of this!"

The man dropped the hammer, and it was immediately picked up by Dick.

Meanwhile, those who bore the iron box had set it down upon the rail.

The large hammer was raised.

Down it came.

Wielded by the muscular arms of Dick, it was bound to make an impression.

The first blow was not successful.

Others were needed.

They came upon the devoted lock like rain, and such a system of tactics was bound to accomplish the desired success.

It gave way.

Jesse James uttered a cry.

"Hold on. It's done, Dick."

He sprang forward and grasped the lid.

One movement and the interior of the strong-box was exposed to their view.

Horrors! it was empty!

CHAPTER IX.

A HOT PURSUIT.

The express messenger had fooled them, after all.

A madder set of men never was seen than Jesse James and his gang of train-robbers, as they gazed into the iron chest and realized that it was most certainly bereft of its late contents.

For about half a minute an ominous silence came upon them.

Then they gave vent to their anger.

It was loud and deep.

Who would have ever thought the messenger could have deceived them so?

No doubt when he found they were on to his dodge,

and likely to come up with him, he had unlocked his box, taken out its contents, and then once more secured it.

The shot he fired might have accomplished just what he intended it for.

Darkness had come upon the scene and delayed matters a little.

What could be done now?

It was too late to think of making a search for the agent.

Covered by darkness, and favored with a fair start, he had doubtless succeeded in putting some space between himself and his enemies.

They might as well look for a needle in a hay-stack as this tricky man in the darkness.

No wonder they were ugly and mad.

All was lost.

That rattling sound along the rails was drawing closer all the while.

Time was valuable now.

"We must clear out, boys. Beaten for once, it's true; but I'll look for that chap again as sure as my name's Jesse James. Who knows his name?"

"It's Aleck Halsey."

"Halsey! I've heard that name before," and a shiver went through the outlaw's frame as he suddenly remembered where it was he had last seen it.

Perhaps it was a fatal name to him.

He remembered the words of Lige Halsey's vow, a detective who had once come very near capturing him, that he would bring Jesse James face to face with the Governor of Missouri.

One after another they scrambled upon the engine.

Flight was now in order.

To save themselves from the clutches of the law meant a good deal to them.

All were on board.

The fireman still lay where he had fallen. His face looked ghastly as seen by the light from the firebox.

He was not dead.

On the contrary, as the engine began to move forward along the rails once more he opened his eyes and looked around him, although none of those upon the motor noticed the fact.

The headlight of the pursuing engine gleamed like a star of the first magnitude far down the track.

It was rushing along at a rapid pace in chase.

As their pace grew faster, the pursuing engine failed to gain upon them.

This was encouraging to say the least.

What proved a source of worry was the fact that they did not know what lay ahead of them.

At any moment they might dash into some obstruction

placed on the track on purpose to wreck them, or else collide with a freight train that barred the way.

Such a catastrophe would be fatal.

It would no doubt send them one and all into the other world, on a sliding scale.

They hated to even think of it.

The pursuing engine kept after them, its blazing headlight looking like an evil eye in the distance, never receding nor advancing, but appearing to hold its own.

Jesse James did not like the situation.

He endeavored to conjure up some plan by means of which those who followed so energetically might be thrown off their track.

In vain.

He could think of no plan.

There was no time to stop and pull up a rail, even had they possessed the appliances for such a piece of business.

A switch would not solve the difficulty.

No doubt those on the pursuing engine had already sighted them, and would keep a close watch.

Seeing them making a temporary halt, they would imagine that something was up, and come to the place slowly.

The only thing that promised success was to abandon their captured locomotive.

At any rate they would soon be approaching a town, and it would be impossible for them to go any farther than the outskirts.

Under these circumstances the outlaw who manipulated the throttle thought it best to shut off steam at a certain point.

Houses were near them.

A small river ran in the direction of the great Mississippi.

At this point the railroad crossed it on a sort of trestle or bridge.

While passing over this the engine was slowed down, and just on the other side it came to a full stop.

Less than fifty yards away was a station.

Lights abounded.

The outlaws saw freight cars upon the track and realized what they had escaped.

People were also seen in numbers; it looked as though the whole town must be out.

What was up?

They came rushing toward the engine as the six outlaws jumped off.

"Halt there! surrender!"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the leader of the outlaws.

"Ain't you Jesse James?" asked the foremost man of the crowd.

"Not much. I'm a sheriff. These are my men. Jesse

James is coming on that engine yonder, and we want to lie in wait for him."

"Oh, that's it, eh? Run your engine on the switch here and let 'em come into the barricade," called out the other.

"It's all a lie! He's Jesse James!" shrieked a voice from the engine.

The fireman had recovered his senses and was leaning out of the cab.

He looked like a fiend, his face marked with alternate layers of blood and coal dirt.

The jig was up.

Hoarse cries came from the crowd.

Jesse James was not to be intimidated by such a small thing.

He whipped out two revolvers and faced the crowd that was armed with shotguns, clubs and all manner of rustic weapons.

"Stand back, you cowards, and let us pass," he roared, savagely.

They heard and obeyed.

Such a man, backed up by others of the same caliber, could control a small army.

The six train-robbers walked past.

No one dared molest them.

The half-crazed fireman alone showed signs of reckless bravery.

He flung huge pieces of coal after them. It was the only weapon he had.

During this scene the other engine had covered much space.

It was now just at the other end of the trestle, and slowing up.

A number of men were on board. They could be seen easily by any one who would cast a glance in that quarter.

No doubt they were members of a sheriff's posse in search of the desperate James gang.

They would arrive too late to do any good unless some leaven of courage was suddenly put into the crowd.

Passing them by the outlaws hurried on.

They only thought of escape now.

The night's escapade had panned out poorly, and they were threatened with capture unless fortune was kind.

When the truth concerning the wrecked express-car was made known, the country would probably be on fire. Men would hunt for them in every direction.

They had retreats where they could lie in hiding until the storm blew over, and then, once more issuing forth, they would again strike a blow at the corporations against which most of their work seemed to be directed.

Many people have wondered why such desperadoes as the James boys were suffered to go free so long.

There were numerous reasons for it.

In the first place their bold natures could not be subdued.

Then, again, they seldom made enemies among the common people, their work being mainly directed against corporations.

Last, but not least, they were always ready to help any one who had ever been connected with the Confederacy.

When robbing a coach full of travelers it was the custom of Jesse James to return everything to them who claimed to have served in the Confederate army, and gave their regiment and brigade.

As he declared, they did not war upon women, preachers of the Gospel, or ex-Confederates.

Thus they had hosts of friends in Missouri, and could always find a hiding-place.

It had come to such a pass, however, that their work was making a bad name for the State, and kept capital from investing.

The notice had gone forth that their escapades must cease, or the governor would find some way of putting an end to their career.

They paid little attention to the notice.

This last piece of devilry on their part would show how little they cared for it.

When they had succeeded in rushing past the crowd, they plunged into the darkness.

The second engine came to a pause close by the other motor.

Men jumped from it.

Hurried questions were asked and as hastily answered.

Thus a sort of explanation seemed to be given between the two parties, and as the crowd gained boldness from the presence of such leaders they started to rush forward in pursuit.

It may always be noticed that when such a crowd is enthused with courage they become wonderfully bold all at once.

These men did.

The shouts they gave utterance to would have sent terror to the heart of any ordinary criminal fleeing from the wrath.

Hoarse cries sounded on the night air as the mob, snatching up lanterns and torches, hastened after the little party.

Jesse James knew what he was doing.

It was not long before they were heading back to the railroad, in the same direction from whence they had come.

They had not doubled on their tracks for nothing.

The lights appeared ahead.

Those who followed, as though divining their plans,

began to shout out warnings, but they had kept up such a clatter all along that their words could not be distinguished.

Hence the outlaws rushed upon the engines without warning.

They mounted the one which had pursued them. When the engineer offered resistance he was thrown from the cab, together with the fireman.

Then the lever was reversed, the throttle pulled open, and with a bound the motor leaped in the direction of the trestle.

Angry shouts sounded.

Weapons were discharged.

Bullets sung around the cab like so many hornets, but no one was injured, and in half a minute they were out of range, dashing over the trestle like mad.

CHAPTER X.

BAFFLED.

The night's work had been well nigh fruitless, but it had given them considerable of excitement. They could not complain on that score at least.

Here they were again, spinning along over the rails at a rapidly increasing pace, and heading in the quarter from whence they had so recently come.

There could be no doubt that the second engine would follow.

What then?

Would it overtake them?

If the steam lasted, Jesse James thought not.

"Fire up, boys," he called out.

A couple of them started to obey.

The steam gauge already indicated a high pressure, and yet he meant to keep it marking more all the while.

Such actions showed the reckless nature of the man better than anything else.

"They have started," called out Frank, who was stationed where he could see what was going on in the rear.

By this time the fugitives had cleared the trestle, and were thundering along the track.

They widened the distance between them to a mile, and even more.

Then the engineer on the other motor had succeeded in getting his machine into good running order, and the distance was not increased.

Jesse James began to consider once more how they could get out of the scrape.

He had several bold plans come before him in rapid rotation.

Perhaps the most daring of these was a reckless scheme, which might not only ruin both fine locomotives, but send several men to death.

It was nothing more nor less than murder.

He thought they might stop the engine, all leave but himself, and before he jumped he could jerk the throttle wide open.

Thus the engines would come together on the same line at full speed.

The result can be imagined better than described.

It was a shocking idea.

Jesse James only abandoned it because he conceived another idea.

He thought of the switch where they had sent the wrecked express car to its doom.

If one could drop off there and send the pursuing engine after the express car it would be well.

He made up his mind.

They would try it.

He bade them keep a sharp lookout for the switch.

Certain landmarks would betray its presence.

Meanwhile he communicated his plan to the man called Mason, who readily agreed to carry it out.

A call was soon heard.

"We are nearing the switch; slow down."

The outlaw obeyed.

He shut off steam, while Mason swung himself out from the cab, ready to drop as soon as the switch was reached. The wheels would betray this fact to him, even though his eyes failed to catch a glimpse of it.

"Ah!"

With the word Mason was gone.

Click! click! went the wheels of the engine, and it was evident that they were passing the point which had already been so important in the business of the night.

The engine began to puff again as steam was applied, and the wheels revolved faster.

During this interim the pursuing engine had gained until it was not more than a quarter of a mile away.

It, too, had begun to slow up, as though the men on board suspected trickery.

Mason swung the switch open.

The engine shot by him.

As soon as they passed off the main line the engineer knew what was up.

"Turn the brake!" he shouted, as he shut off steam and reversed the lever.

An engine can be stopped within a few lengths if not going too fast, as there are no cars to push it on with their momentum.

All the same this machine only came to a stop when it crashed into the *débris* of the express-car, and, although not exactly demolished, it was really placed out of the game.

As soon as Mason saw the engine pass him, he whipped the switch shut, and with a piece of iron bent

the bar by means of heavy blows, so that it would be impossible to open it again for quite a while.

Having done his part of the work, he ran down the track, and soon the engine bearing his companions was gained.

They were waiting for him.

When he had scrambled upon the cow-catcher, Jesse James called out:

"Are you aboard?"

"All here," some one answered.

Loud voices were heard near by.

Some of them from the other engine were running toward them.

He called out mocking words as he let on steam, and the engine began to leave them in the lurch.

They answered with shouts and shots, but the outlaws laughed at both.

They had nothing to fear, having by this time gone far enough away to be out of range of the bullets.

Again the superior strategy of Jesse James had made itself manifest, and his enemies were left out in the cold.

He could now deem himself secure, for they had no means of chasing him.

It had been a night of misfortune to the James gang, and yet when he looked back on the numerous narrow escapes that had fallen to their lot, they could not but be thankful that they had been so lucky.

All they could do now was to pass into retirement, and await the turn of events.

He turned to his companions.

All were more or less disguised, so that their real identity could not be sworn to in case they were ever brought up for wrecking the express-car and hindering the mails.

"It's no use, boys."

"Then we give it up?"

"For to-night, yes."

"What's the word, Jesse?"

"Separate."

Barton was miles away from his home.

"Are we near the horses?" he asked.

"Yes; not two miles away."

"Then we can use them."

"I reckon so."

"Good!"

A hurried conversation ensued.

It was decided that they lose no more time in making any attempts to lay hold of the coveted money.

The whole country was aroused.

Officers would be flocking to the scene by scores before morning, spurred on by the great incentive that lay in the reward offered by the State and the express company.

Really the ground would be too hot to hold them, and

the sooner they were in cover, the better it would be for them.

Finally they set out for the place where the horses had been taken some time previous.

Their plans had been simple enough.

If the large sum that was in the express-car had fallen into their unscrupulous hands, it would have been immediately divided, as soon as they reached the horses.

Then, mounting, they would have galloped away, separating as they went.

The same thing would be their plan now, only their temper was not improved by the fact that they did not carry the plunder.

With them that was the one thing needful.

Jesse James, Frank, and perhaps one of the others would stick together.

This was their plan.

They drew nearer the place where the horses had been kept.

It was the stable of a small farmer who had a poor name in the neighborhood, since he was suspected of an alliance with the James gang.

No one dared to do him injury for fear lest such a move might bring down upon them the anger of the James gang.

By this time it was midnight.

A pale-looking moon was creeping up the eastern heavens.

By means of this illumination they could at least see where they were going.

The farm was before them.

All seemed as quiet as death.

"I reckon it's all right, boys," said the leader.

"That's whar you're mistaken, Jesse James."

The voice came out from the bushes.

"Hello!" ejaculated the outlaw.

"Don't shoot, boys."

A man's head was thrust into view. Then he crawled out of his place of concealment.

"Bah! it's you, is it, Ben?"

"On deck, cap'n."

"What's this mean?"

"Danger."

"Confusion take it—even here."

"Then you ain't been successful, cap'n?" quickly catching his cue from the ugly tone of the other's voice.

"No. But tell us about this thing. Where does the danger lie?"

The man waved his hand.

He seemed to point in the direction of the barn, and they readily understood.

"Well?"

Some time ago, just when the moon was getting out of
I seen a man slip into the barn."
Alone?"

Well, that I can't say. I fancied I could hear many
es and even thought it might be you and the boys."
Yes."

When I gave the signal there was no answer, so I
w this must be a stranger."

Did you see him go away?"

No."

You watched?"

As well as I could. My first thought was to warn
I, for I believed there was a lot of 'em, and that they
s settin' a trap for you."

Jesse James became thoughtful.

Here was a new predicament.

What should be done?

"Hope the fellow ain't hamstrung the horses," said the
n called Ben.

The outlaw leader's face grew dark.

"There are such devils living," he said.

In his mind the man who would harm a horse was more
a fiend than one who would commit a murder.

"Come on; we'll soon know what's in the wind," he
d, resolutely.

They advanced toward the barn.

All was still in that quarter.

If the enemy was waiting to get a good show at them
w was the time.

Suddenly Jesse James heard a sound that gave him a
ill of relief.

It was the low neigh of a horse.

This seemed to indicate that the animals were not only
hurt but in the barn.

He opened the door.

Ben lighted a lantern.

"All here?" he said, with grim pleasure.

"Yes, thank goodness. But what's this?"

A card was pinned to his saddle. He held the lantern
it, and swore aloud.

It bore a name.

"Elijah Halsey!"

CHAPTER XI.

JESSE JAMES IN ST. LOUIS.

Tearing the card into pieces seemed to relieve the out-
law's mind a little, but he was worried all the same.

This man had a faculty for getting into places where
e would be least expected.

The outlaws led their horses out of the stable.

"Mount!"

Each man sprang into the saddle.

A few words passed between them relative to their
next meeting. Then they separated.

Three rode away in a bunch.

The others radiated from the common center and
aimed for their several homes.

After the raid that had proved such a failure, the
country was apt to be too hot for them, and they would
be wise to be found at home.

The James boys, with their single companion, rode
many miles on this night.

Ere morning came they were among the hills and in
a secure den.

Here they remained some time.

The country was at fever heat over the bold attempt
to rob the express company, and the destruction of the
car.

This last piece of business was the most brazen thing
that had ever been attempted by train-robbers on the soil
of Missouri.

It went to show what desperate men would do if con-
fronted by difficulties.

There were placards posted at every crossing and each
village tavern.

The large rewards offered for the apprehension or
death of the James boys stared every person in the face.

It was strange that some of the reckless men of the
border did not attempt to rake in that reward.

A singular fear restrained them.

After a week of idleness Jesse James one day an-
nounced his intention of going away for a short time.

He said nothing as to his destination, nor did Frank
question him.

It was a regular thing for the outlaw to wander around
and pick up points that could be utilized in their work.

Thus he learned every now and then through agents
in the employ of the express company when large pack-
ages of money were to be sent along the road.

These things enabled him to govern himself accord-
ingly.

Many of their raids had been constructed upon these
lines, and carried out to a successful termination.

He rode to a village near by through which the Iron
Mountain Railway ran.

Here he met a young man, who had lately joined his
gang. He left his horse in charge of a friend and
boarded a train.

Had Frank James seen them buy their tickets he
would have been surprised.

They were through ones.

What took Jesse James to St. Louis?

He seemed to consult a calendar pasted inside his hat
a number of times, as though figuring out certain dates.

Perhaps he had an engagement.

It would not be the first time he had gone to the great city on the Missouri. Indeed, he had met with numerous adventures there in times gone by.

It was certainly a strange errand the outlaw was on.

This dare-devil was about to undertake one of the strangest fancies that ever entered his reckless head.

It was nothing less than to be introduced to the governor of Missouri.

Jesse James' famous call on Governor Crittenden, now a matter of history, was undertaken as the result of a wager with one of his gang.

His companion on that eventful trip was a new member of his gang, who had been personally acquainted with the governor.

His name was Dick Foster.

At last the city was reached.

When the train rolled in, darkness had fallen over the great beehive.

Myriads of lights were to be seen.

The two outlaws quickly alighted from the train, and passing out to the street, they walked along rapidly.

After traversing several blocks, they came to a dingy street, which they turned down, and finally came to an empty house, which they opened with a key.

Jesse James had evidently stopped there before. In fact, it was one of his hiding-places.

Two hours later the two outlaws could have been seen talking together in low tones in the deserted house.

"What time is it?" asked Jesse.

His companion glanced up at the clock.

"Only eleven. Plenty of time to carry out our plans. The governor little dreams of the pleasure in store for him."

"Will the horses be in waiting?"

"We will make sure of that before going in."

The outlaw showed a liking for the game directly from the start.

It promised excitement.

That was what he lived on.

Besides, there was a chance of more notoriety, and the audacity of the game gave him satisfaction. He was in it for all the thing was worth.

When he was dressed up, Jesse James was as gentlemanly a figure as one would wish to see, wearing a Prince Albert coat, and with all the accompaniments necessary as a passport to the best society.

"How do I look?" he asked.

"Here's a mirror; see for yourself."

The other strode across the room and stood before the glass, surveying himself from head to foot with interest.

Finally he laughed, and, grasping his companion by the arm, they quitted the room.

Once on the street, they hailed a passing cab.

"Do you know where Judge Latham's is?" asked Jesse of the cabman.

"Is he the one who is giving a reception to the governor to-night?"

"Yes."

"I'll take you there, sir."

They jumped in and were off in a jiffy.

"Seems to be in the suburbs," remarked Jesse, as they were leaving the city.

"Yes; the judge has an elegant suburban home. You will see the *élite* of the city there to-night; but to all others your name shall be Dr. Demarest, while I will be Dick Foster, my regular name."

Dick Foster for once seemed to be in command of Jesse.

But this was only because he was so familiar with the place they were about to enter.

He had made all the arrangements, as none of his old acquaintances knew of his new career.

"Here we are."

After a long drive the cab had come to a halt.

"Shall I wait, gents?"

"No; here's your money."

"Good-night, gents."

When they were alone in the lighted grounds, Dick said:

"You will not need anything beyond the horse I have provided, and I will escape by the opposite window."

"Good."

"Is there anything you would like to know before we enter?"

The outlaw laughed.

"Well, yes. You forget that I may have to leave this place in a hurry."

"True."

"Hence it may be necessary that I be acquainted with the place where the horse is in hiding, as I shall want him badly."

"I should say so. Come, let us saunter down this path. The animal is not far away, I assure you."

The garden was almost deserted.

Strains of music floated through the open windows of the house, and many voices could be heard, proving that the judge's reception was quite an immense affair.

Still there was a certain chill in the night air that deterred most people from venturing out in the beautifully-lighted grounds.

It was very much like a fairy scene.

The Missouri outlaw made himself quite at home. Fear was unknown to him.

Dick seemed to know the way.

He led his companion among the bushes, and in a

ded nook came upon a horse tethered to the limb of
e.

was rather dark.

he outlaw patted the animal, and ran his hand over
quarters.

o man in all Missouri knew more about horses than

A noble brute," said he, with enthusiasm.

Have you the line from the house here, so that, no
er what your hurry, you will not make any mistake?"

have it down pat."

Good! Now let me give you the way out."

That is highly important."

You see, after mounting, you can cut the hitching
o with a knife; then head straight on. A few jumps

gs you to this bridge over the creek. There is quite
le cañon under it, and a tumble would mean a broken

. Hence, I have had a Chinese lantern hung there."

You have a confederate?"

The judge's man is with me to a certain extent. I
e been able to arrange all these things by his help.

Crossing the bridge you will soon come to the gate.
unlocked."

Let us make sure of that."

taking hold of the structure, the Missouri outlaw
ed the latch and found that what Dick had stated
a fact.

Well, what do you think of it?"

Everything seems capitally arranged. I don't be-
e I'll have any trouble in getting away."

Then there is nothing more?"

I see nothing."

We can go to the house?"

Whenever you are ready."

That is now."

You don't intend to spring the surprise on the com-
y right away?"

Not for an hour or so. Amuse yourself as you
se, only try to keep me in sight."

When you are about ready, what signal will you
e?"

If you see me yawn and put my handkerchief to my
e as though to conceal the act, that will be the sign.
n me."

All right."

I will select a time as will give you the best chance
escape."

Not through the door—that might possibly be locked
the time."

Through a window?"

Yes—they are only six feet or so from the ground.
an make a flying leap and then bolt for the place
ere the horse is hidden.

"Consider it settled."

They walked toward the house.

On the way Jesse James again carefully scrutinized
every foot of the path.

He did well to be particular.

An hour or so later he would come flying along that
path in mad haste, with perhaps a shouting mob behind
him.

A mistake at such a time would not only be serious—
it might be fatal.

When a man's life is in danger he does well to make
sure of these small things, and from past experience
Jesse James had learned the value of trifles.

They go to make up the sum of human existence the
world over.

Thus they drew near the house.

"Wait for me here a minute or so," whispered the
outlaw to his companion.

He came back in the time specified.

"What have you been doing?"

"Examining the ground under each open window.
If I make a flying jump, as I may have to, I don't want
to be tripped up and perhaps have a leg broken."

"Did you find them all right?"

"Everything is lovely, and the goose hangs high," re-
turned the outlaw, flippantly.

Thus the two men entered the palatial residence of the
illustrious judge.

CHAPTER XII.

JESSE JAMES AT THE SOIREE.

The scene was one of the grandest ever known in the
fashionable world of St. Louis.

With the governor and other notables present, it can
be set down for certain that the judge had left nothing
undone.

There was a gathering of fair women and brave men—
diamonds flashed in the gaslight from ears and fingers,
throats and hair, fortunes in a very small compass.

Perhaps the eyes of the Missouri outlaw felt watery as
he gazed upon these precious gems.

It was his business in life to take from the wealthy,
unlawful of course, and deserving of punishment; but he
seldom, if ever, wronged the poor.

He was no hero—it is not the purpose of this narrative
to make him such—but there were times when he cer-
tainly could lay no claim to the devilish nature such
as the papers credited him with; he respected woman-
kind, and had his own peculiar notions regarding his
course.

Often he had declared that he was only the same old
Confederate, fighting as of yore against the Government.

He never knowingly robbed an ex-Confederate, and

had been known to return to a minister of the gospel what was taken from him.

At the same time he had been guilty of more than one cruel murder in the past.

Men had hunted him, and in so doing taken their lives in their hands.

More than one such had vanished in a mysterious fashion.

Could the mountains of Missouri speak, they would tell some remarkable stories of this singular man's career.

It is strange how most men go through life in a quiet, even way, while others meet with adventures by the wholesale.

These things are apparently unjustly distributed.

We generally hear the guilty ones sighing for new scenes and something to break up the awful monotony that makes life almost unbearable, while, on the other hand, the hunted desperado, meeting adventures on every side, would give much to be let alone.

The brilliant scene did not appear to afford Jesse James any reason for embarrassment.

He made himself quite at home.

Many persons noticed him.

He was a stranger.

They wondered who he could be.

In some way—these rumors have a source, but can never be traced back—it was passed around that he was a Dr. Demorest, a very wealthy New Yorker, visiting St. Louis with the intention of settling there; that he was a bachelor, with such means that the belles of the East had exhausted their batteries in the vain attempt to catch him.

These facts immediately made him a hero in the eyes of the ladies.

Many watched him with unusual interest.

Jesse James was a striking-looking man, though hardly handsome, but the halo of that fortune made him appear a god in the eyes of many a young woman present.

Rich young husbands were scarce.

The old men had a monopoly there, and in the society of to-day it is astonishing how many girls sell themselves to rich old men.

Of course, Jesse James could not but be conscious of the scrutiny he was under.

He had an idea regarding the truth, too, and smiled blandly to think what a grievous disappointment would come upon these maidens, and matrons with daughters on their hands, when the truth was known.

Time passed on.

It would not be long now before Dick must be giving the signal.

Two minutes later he turned up at the side of Dick,

the same cool man of iron nerve ready to face death in order to carry out a scheme that really had no promise in it.

"How do things lie?" he asked.

"I believe they cannot be improved on. There are fewer persons around the governor than at any time this evening. You see for yourself."

The outlaw swept a hasty glance around.

It took in everything.

He noted that there were not many persons between the windows and the spot where the officers of the State Guard were standing.

All seemed well.

"Let us move forward."

"Agreed," returned Dick.

They approached the spot.

Several of the governor's staff were near by, and was from them trouble would come, if at all, as they were soldiers.

Dick used considerable judgment in selecting his way of advance.

He did not mean to be in the other's line of sudden retreat when the time came.

Thus they drew near.

The governor saw them coming, but paid little heed for his arm was doubtless aching from the repeated shakes it had received.

Many people seem to believe a human arm is like a pump-handle, and can be used accordingly.

They were now directly in front.

The governor found himself compelled to look.

His eyes rested upon Dick Foster for a moment, and then a puzzled look appeared on his face.

He was looking at the outlaw now.

Did he recognize him?

It hardly seemed credible, and yet something familiar about the other attracted him.

Before he could make up his mind how this came about they were before him.

Dick bowed and the governor returned the salute in a courteous manner.

"Governor, you remember me?"

"Yes, you are young Dick Foster. I have cause to remember you, since you earned the gratitude of every good citizen by the work you did for the State in the Humler affair," returned the executive.

"Governor, allow me to introduce my companion."

The governor put out his hand.

"Ah! you have forgotten one thing of importance, Mr. Foster," while the other was working away with the usual pump-handle method at his arm.

"What is that, pray, your excellency?"

"You forgot to mention his name."

"I beg your pardon, governor. Allow me to introduce one whom you have long desired to meet—Jesse James, of Missouri."

Then silence fell.

Dick had purposely spoken in quite a loud voice so that all those standing near must have heard his words. All eyes were instantly riveted upon the face of the man as introduced.

He stood there smiling as though such a thing as danger never entered his head.

"Glad to meet you, governor—hope your health is as good as ever."

"Bless my soul, you are a cool one, Jesse James. Don't you know you risk death coming here?"

"It won't be for the first time, governor, and I took a chance to come. I reckon I can bid you good-night now, and retire," returned the outlaw, with a slight bow.

"Wait."

"Thank you, governor, I'm in somewhat of a hurry at this time—another time."

"Seize that man."

"Good-night."

Unfortunately for their success, the governor's staff did not come to the entertainment armed and prepared to capture criminals.

They started forward valiantly, to lay hands on the outlaw-robber.

At sight of the revolver in his hands, however, their enthusiasm grew colder, and they dared not attempt to seize him.

Thus Jesse James retreated.

He kept his face to the foe.

Long experience had taught the value of this, and he was not to be caught napping.

The windows were near.

Of course as his name flew around the room, the excitement became intense.

Men and women craned their necks for just one glimpse of the desperado, over whose bold deeds the country was ringing.

This beat them all.

A certain number had followed him, forming a semicircle, eager to seize upon the first available opportunity to jump upon him.

Thus the side of the large room was reached.

Behind him was a window.

"Once more, good-night, gentlemen and ladies."

With the words the outlaw made a leap and vanished through the opening.

Then the silence was broken.

Bedlam reigned.

Many voices sounded, and every one seemed to be talking together.

Above the clamor arose the clarion voice of the governor—in this time of excitement he was able to keep his wits about him and knew just what to do in order to bring order out of chaos.

Acting under his orders, a dozen sprang from the windows, and started to follow the fugitive in his flight.

Perhaps a number of them were armed, for certain men will carry a small revolver along with them everywhere they go.

At any rate, a race began.

Jesse James knew the way.

He made no mistake about that.

His pursuers, of course, ran this way and that, as their inclinations drew them, but those who took the right course shouted to the others, so that the general pursuit was pretty hot.

The spot where the horse had been left was soon reached.

Would he find the animal there?

Perhaps some strange freak of fate might have discovered the animal's hiding-place to some wandering guest, who might have taken a notion to remove the animal to another quarter.

Such a thing would disturb his plans.

It would add new danger to his position.

Hence, as was natural, the man experienced some nervousness as he drew near the copse that had sheltered the animal.

He had drawn his knife.

The blade was open and held so that he could make immediate use of it.

He remembered the instructions given by Dick to cut the hitching strap, and not wait to unfasten it.

A neigh greeted him.

This relieved his mind—the horse was there.

His eyes by this time became, in a measure, accustomed to the darkness, and although the animal was chestnut in color, he could distinguish his outlines.

Quickly he groped for the saddle, swung himself up, and then, bending forward, reached for the hitching strap.

As his hand came in contact with this, he drew the keen blade across it.

The animal was free.

With a thump, the heels of the outlaw came down against the flanks of the horse.

A furious bound and the animal was off—he knew how to guide him, for the bridge over the little cañon was close at hand.

Something had happened—the Chinese lantern no longer lighted the bridge.

Some one had extinguished it, or else the whole affair had burned up.

He could not wait to see.

The whole pack of pursuers was now shouting at his heels, and growing in numbers with each passing second.

He must push boldly on.

The bridge was before him—his horse's hoofs thundered upon the planks and the delicate structure trembled under the severe strain.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HOT CHASE.

A few leaps took him over the bridge in safety, and then he made direct for the door in the wall, through which he was to effect his escape.

The darkness became intense.

His previous knowledge of how things lay now served him well.

Making no mistake he headed his steed directly for the spot.

The wall was close by.

A few jumps only would serve to take him to it.

Ah! the dark shadow loomed up before him blacker even than its surroundings.

He jumped from his seat.

The door could only be opened in such a manner and he did not begrudge the minute spent in such an operation.

Groping around his hand came in contact with the knob.

He turned it.

What was this—the door resisted.

He bent a fierce pressure upon it.

There was no result.

It flashed upon him that the door must be locked.

Could it mean treachery?

The thought flashed upon him.

He remembered a significant fact—the lantern at the bridge was out.

Connecting the two it seemed as though some one must have been up to mischief.

This was no time for speculation.

The enemy all the while were closing in, and if he wasted another minute or two he would find himself surrounded.

As luck would have it he remembered something just at this moment.

That something was an old ax.

How it came to be here perhaps no one could tell, when groping around during his former visit of investigation his hand had come in contact with it.

Could he find it now?

If so the case would not be hopeless.

Eagerly he sought to reach it, and when his hand closed upon vacancy, something escaped the desperado's lips—a curse.

Had the old ax been removed also?

It looked like a dead sure thing.

The fates were all against him.

At any rate he could turn at bay and face his enemy like a tiger.

Perhaps he might abandon the horse and lose him in the garden.

It was luxuriant enough to afford him some chance of concealment.

When the ardor of the chase cooled down he could make his escape.

Before making up his mind he thought a last effort the search for the ax might bring about some tangible result.

In this he was correct.

His hand came in contact with the article which he sought.

A wild, fierce joy thrilled him as he clutched the tool.

He swung it around.

Crash!

The desperate blow had been struck at the spot where the lock of the door was supposed to be, in his estimation.

Whether he struck it or not he could have no conception, nor was the time propitious for an examination now.

With deadly earnestness he rained blows upon the devoted door.

It groaned under the assault.

Surely no ordinary lock could stand such a fierce onslaught.

This one must be broken into splinters.

At length he desisted.

The time which had been consumed since his discovering the ax had been exceedingly short—not more than a score of seconds.

He had been enabled to do a tremendous amount of execution, however.

When he came to investigate he found the door no longer resisted.

His security was gone.

With one effort he flung it wide open and the path was clear.

It was time.

The voices of the pursuers sounded close by, and had not been further delayed the chances of his escape must have been considerably lessened.

Jesse James turned to his horse.

Fortunately, the animal had not been alarmed by the sound of the swinging ax coming in contact with the decorated door.

He stood just where he had been left.

Bravely the daring outlaw swung himself upon the animal's back.

Now let them come.

He felt safe.

With a good horse under him Jesse James was able to defy his enemies—on foot he often felt like a sailor on shore.

Through the gate he passed.

The noise behind had grown so loud that the whole neighborhood was stirred up.

As if it was a reception to the governor, a great crowd had assembled.

There were numerous police officers on duty near by, in order to control the people.

This was the source of another danger which had not been calculated on.

The excitement was intense.

People were rushing this way and that, and lights could be seen.

"There he is!"

Someone shouted out the words as the horseman came into view.

"Stop him!"

"Shoot him down!"

These were desperate threats, but they might just as well have talked of stopping a whirlwind as the man who burst through the garden wall.

He scorned their threats.

Double this number would not have caused him to hesitate.

He grasped his bridle between his teeth and gave the horse another dig in the ribs with both heels together.

From a holster attached to the saddle he had drawn a revolver of the cavalry pattern.

Jesse James now had a revolver in either hand, and thus armed dashed at his enemies.

They had gathered in front of him, rapidly endeavoring to present a solid front.

It was a thrilling scene.

The officers and citizens thus formed into an impromptu posse were not to be daunted by mere looks alone.

They had true grit.

The torches borne by a number, snatched from certain bonfires built by boys near by, aided in dispelling the darkness.

Thus the opposing forces were enabled to see each other plainly.

There could be no concealment.

In the course of an eventful life such as the Missouri outlaw must have led during the past fifteen years, he had certainly seen times just as dangerous as this.

A lucky fortune seemed to be his.

He dashed at his enemies with the fury that generally characterized his aggressive movements.

His presence inspired them with alarm.

Strange as it may seem, men who had been classed as sharpshooters—who could hit the head of a nail as far as seen, generally lost all control over their powers when in the presence of Jesse James.

They often acted as though demoralized, and this species of "rackets" among his enemies saved the desperado's life more than once.

Thus it happened now.

Like wildfire the news had flown from mouth to mouth.

"Jesse James is here!"

Every one knew whom they hunted, and the first sight they had of him bearing down on them like mad on his charger put electricity into their frames.

They saw and trembled.

A great fear came upon nearly all.

Had Satan himself, horns and all, come bearing down upon them in a chariot of fire, and breathing brimstone fires, they could hardly have been more terribly alarmed.

Several fled.

A few more sought safety by throwing themselves upon the ground.

If bullets rattled about in a promiscuous fashion they hoped to escape being hit.

Others remained erect.

Perhaps they possessed more bravery, or it might be lacked the power to escape.

At any rate there was a line of men who opposed the outlaw's advance.

Talk about the "thin red line" of the British, here was a ragged attempt at keeping a bold display, and with total disregard of all military tactics or system.

The result was evident even before the mounted thunderbolt struck.

A stone being hurled through a window with force will cut a clean hole.

So this mounted man must break his way across the line of his foes.

One thing alone could stop him

A bullet.

Whether by some mere accident or through deep design it struck his horse or himself, such a thing might break up his plans.

A dead man could not fight any more than could a mortally-wounded animal carry his master far.

Already the quick detonation of revolvers told that the firing has begun.

Both sides opened it.

The horse and rider seemed to loom up before the eyes of the alarmed posse as though they were of giant size.

Forward they rushed.

Surely they breathed fire and smoke, or was it the result of the shots that were sent from the outlaw's revolver.

There was a series of shouts, more shots, and then the thing was over.

Where was Jesse James?

If they expected to see him on the ground they made a great mistake.

He had run the gantlet.

Once more his daring had carried him through a bad place.

He had not escaped unscathed.

A bullet had cut a gash in his arm, and he noticed that his horse was unsteady.

The latter circumstances gave him more concern than anything else.

Meanwhile the posse having recovered in a degree from the state into which the rapid assault of the outlaw had

thrown them, and finding that only a few of their number were down with serious wounds, started in pursuit of the fugitive.

They could not have attempted this only that it became known that his horse was wounded.

There chanced to be some man in charge of the outfit who possessed a certain amount of bravery.

Besides, a strange report had been circulated in a singular way.

It was to the effect that the governor had been shot by Jesse James.

Such a thing gave the men a new desire to chase the dreaded outlaw.

With these various things for an inspiration, the officers joined in a grand rush forward.

They gathered courage from the fact that they were now pursuers.

Position is everything.

Let a man feel that he is chasing another, and the chase begets a confidence that causes him to swell out with vast importance.

So these lately-affrighted officers became men again when they found that the dreaded Jesse James was running away from their anger.

With shouts they pursued.

Others came from their hiding-places and joined in the man hunt.

It seems a great feat to some men to have a share in such a thing.

How these bold worthies shouted at the top of their lungs, as though they hoped to scare the fugitive by noise.

They evidently had forgotten the nature of the thing they pursued.

It might have reminded one of a pack of curs chasing a wolf—so long as the latter ran, how boldly they followed, but should he turn with a fierce and bristling front how quickly these same valiant brutes would run away with their tails between their legs.

To hear the noise made one might think the whole city of St. Louis was aroused to fever heat over something.

It may be noticed, however, that dogs which bark loudest are generally the least to be feared.

At least that has been the experience of many, and the same truths of this kind seldom vary.

How did it come that the outlaw, mounted as he was, failed to get beyond the range of their visions?

Not once had he passed the line of light cast by their torches.

There could be but one answer.

His horse was indeed mortally wounded, and was hardly able to walk away, much less go on a fast trot.

"We'll have him yet," shouted one enthusiastic pursuer, the same man who had been concealed behind a log during the exchange of shots.

"The horse is down."

"Rush on him!"

Sure enough, Jesse James had lost his splendid mount—beside the railroad track his horse had fallen—there he stood at bay with one foot on the dying beast and a devilish determination in his defiant attitude.

CHAPTER XIV.

TERROR-STRUCK.

Men never advanced with more enthusiasm than did the posse up to the time when they discovered the fact that Jesse James stood at bay.

There was that in his attitude to strike terror into their hearts.

The most cowardly began to find excuses for failing to advance.

They swung forward, but it was in a hesitating sort of way, only induced by numbers. Such an assault seldom carries on to victory.

Heroes rush forward with the determination to do or to die.

That grim figure awaited them.

He had already half exhausted his weapon.

There was enough left to do considerable damage among his enemies, and create something of a panic, if properly placed.

Who could dispose of these bullets with more disastrous results than this king of train-robbers?

His skill with the revolver has never been questioned on the border.

Few were his equals.

Superiors he had none.

No matter what scene of excitement he was engaged in, his aim was generally true and to the point.

He saw these men rushing upon him.

His first desire was to pick the leaders.

Such a crowd is always carried forward by one or two men.

Once these go down, the balance breaks into detachments capable of doing no harm.

A wise man, therefore, would seek to make way with just such leaders.

It is often done in battle.

More than one game has been won by just such tactics.

Men deprived of those they are accustomed to obeying, become a disorganized mass, and are driven like sheep.

The train-robber's quick eye picked out the man who was the brains of the posse.

He immediately downed him.

One shot was enough.

The poor wretch went over like a log, gained his knees again, and terribly wounded as he was, called to his men to push on.

There were several others capable of holding a position at the head of the force.

They now assumed this place.

"On, men. Down the train-robber! Avenge the governor. Rush on him!"

Such cries arose.

Strange to say, however, the downfall of their leader and the presence of that man at bay seemed to take much of the vim out of them.

They still advanced, but it was in a manner that indicated hesitation.

Who would be the next victim?

That appeared to be the question which disturbed their minds.

Each man feared lest he himself had been marked out by the Grim Destroyer, and that the crack of a revolver was about to sound his doom.

Once more he fired.

Another man left the ranks, spinning around like a teetotum, blindly groping for support, and then fell.

What awful certainty there was back of that man's flashing aim!

He seemed to only look and death came.

If the advance was weak before, it seemed to become doubly so now.

Another half-leader began to open fire in a half-reckless fashion.

He did not seem to care just where his lead went, so long as he disposed of it.

Others were excited by his example into trying the same thing.

Thus bullets began to fly around the ears of the train-robber, until it sounded just as though he had stirred up a hornet's nest.

He was wounded in half-a-dozen places by this time, but paid little attention to this.

Indeed, his wounds only served to make him feel as though he was being burned by fire—to irritate him as it were, and make him fierce in the desire for revenge.

A third shot he sent.

This was wasted.

Just as he pulled trigger, the man he intended shooting tripped over some object in his way and fell.

He arose, cursing heartily and never suspected that his life had been saved by that tumble.

When Jesse James went to fire again, he was chagrined to find that the hammer had fallen upon a bare nipple.

That revolver was empty.

He cast it into the crowd with a shout, and drew upon the other one.

It was just at this time that one of those strange things occurred, which seldom come to an ordinary man, but which seem to have been brought frequently in the life of the notorious train-robber.

There was a sharp whistle.

Then came the sound of a bell.

An engine was approaching.

The driver, seeing many lights upon or near the track, had naturally shut off steam and was slowly but steadily slowing up.

A wild hope flashed into the fertile brain of the man at bay.

Why should he not make use of this piece of good fortune?

It certainly looked as though the locomotive had been guided to the spot for some purpose, and what was he to believe but that this might be but to save him!

Would it stop?

Even if the driver slowed up enough for him to leap aboard, he could doubtless accomplish the wild object that had been so suddenly created in his brain.

Turning, he ran in the direction of the engine.

His enemies divined his intention.

They shouted out wild words.

If the driver had understood, there was still time for him to have jerked open the throttle and allowed the engine to bound forward at a furious pace that would have rendered it impossible for a man to jump aboard without great risk.

The number of voices raised in that great shout baffled the purpose of the speakers.

A conglomeration of sounds ensued, and those on the engine did not understand what was up until Jesse James was almost ready to come aboard.

Then the driver did what he should have done in the start.

The engine gave a plunge forward.

It would gain momentum, until in ten or twenty seconds its pace must be simply terrific.

Too late.

The outlaw made a leap.

He caught the support at the side of the cab and began to draw himself in, having secured a foothold.

The fireman had picked up a heavy sledge-hammer which was used to break coal.

With this raised, he threatened to brain the intruder on the spot.

Some men would have leaped back.

Not so Jesse James.

His one arm was free.

That hand clutched a revolver, which was thrust into the fireman's begrimed face.

"Drop that, do you hear? I am Jesse James."

That was enough.

There seemed to be more magic in the mention of that name than if he had declared himself to be the President.

The fireman backed away and let the hammer fall on the coal.

Jesse James was aboard.

He crouched there, to avoid the bullets that might be fired.

One thing he was sure of—while they were going at this mad pace no person would be foolhardy enough to even make an attempt to board the engine.

Nor was there more than a couple of shots fired, and these were probably sent at random, for they did no harm.

Jesse James instantly detected the fact that the engine driver had shut off steam.

He at once covered the man.

"Let her go for all she's worth," he said.

"Just so," replied the other.

Like a sensible man, he saw he could not help himself, and hence obeyed orders.

They immediately left the crowd behind and darted along the rails out into the country.

This was all very good so far as it went, but the astute train-robber knew the telegraph would be quickly brought into play by his enemies.

He did not mean to be so caught.

"How far to the next station?" he asked.

"Four miles," was the reply.

"Is it a telegraph station?"

"No."

"Where does the next one come in?"

"Three miles beyond."

"All right. At a certain place I'll give you the shake. Keep up this speed meanwhile."

Soon they sped past a station.

Then they shot into the darkness again.

Jesse James waited several minutes.

He figured that they had gone about two miles or so, and hence the telegraph station must be one more ahead.

"Stop here."

They were in a thick wood.

When the engine ceased to move he leaped to the ground.

"Now," as he covered the engineer with his revolver, "go back again to where you came from."

There could be no beating around the bush with this man.

He meant business.

So the engine went flying back over the rails, whistling as it ran.

Jesse James plunged into the woods.

He soon came upon a farmhouse, and with his usual audacity, compelled the farmer to lend him a horse.

Mounted he rode away.

The whole country around St. Louis was aroused by his daring feat—posses of men searched high and low, but they were quite unable to discover him.

Jesse James had friends.

They secreted him, and by easy stages he once more reached his mountain home.

A few days after Dick Foster joined him. He had easily made his escape at the reception during the confusion that followed the discovery of Jesse James.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 21) will contain the further adventures of Jesse James, the story being entitled "Jesse James in the Northwest."

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